

**May 11, 2005**  
**Statement: Rep. Robert Wexler**  
**Hearing: The State of U.S.-Turkish Relations**

Thank you for holding today's hearing on US-Turkish relations. I want to thank all of the distinguished members of this panel for testifying today.

Mr. Chairman, we are at an historic crossroad in US-Turkish relations. This strategic partnership which has endured and prospered for over fifty years from the Cold War to Afghanistan has been weakened by diplomatic gaffes, policy divergences over Iraq, Syria and other regional issues and anti-Americanism leading to growing mistrust and strain between Washington and Ankara. Also what was once considered the bedrock of the relationship the defense partnership is no longer the glue holding the partnership together following the Turkish Parliament's vote on March 1, 2003 against opening US Northern Front on Turkish soil and American detention and humiliation of Turkish Troops at Sulaymaniya on July 4, 2003.

Despite serious strains in relations, strong US-Turkish cooperation remains in the best interests of both nations for the foreseeable future and steps must be taken to repair the relationship -- ensuring that the February strategic partnership declaration of Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Gul is more than just empty rhetoric.

Moving forward, the United States must address Turkish fears about our policies in Iraq including the potential for an independent Kurdish, maltreatment of Iraqi Turkmen, the future of Kirkuk as well as the continued presence of PKK terrorist. I am confident the Bush Administration shares my view that territorial integrity of Iraq must remain in tact and that all Iraqis regardless of ethnicity or religion must be respected and remain part of the political process. Regarding the PKK, I urge the Administration to follow through on Secretary Rice's recent pledge to Foreign Minister Gul to "rid the region of terrorism, including terrorism that might take place from the territory of Iraq."

Ankara in turn must address deepening concerns about rising anti-Americanism in Turkey. While I understand that an overwhelming number of Turks opposed the war in Iraq, I am deeply concerned about the long term impact of anti-Americanism on the relationship. It is not enough for Turkish officials to pronounce the importance of bilateral relations abroad we must see a greater AKP government response to anti-Americanism on the ground. Additionally while it has never been prevalent in Turkey, Prime Minister Erdogan must enforce his nation's zero tolerance policy as it relates to combating anti-Semitism and educating the public about hate-filled propaganda such as "Mein Kampf."

Mr. Chairman, although bilateral problems have occurred over the past two years, US-Turkish relationship remains a critical component to security, stability and reform in Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Balkans. In this regard, Prime Minister Erdogan and the Turkish military should be praised for their central role in Afghanistan -- where Ankara has again taken the leadership role of the International Security Assistance

Force. Additionally, US efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan would have been crippled without the use of Turkey's Incirlik airbase where thousands of flights ferrying supplies, soldiers and other materials have landed following September 11.

Prime Minister Erdogan's upcoming visit to Washington is a perfect opportunity to renew US-Turkish relation and reinvigorate historic cooperation that mutually benefits both countries. While the US-Turkish relationship remains strong in a number of areas from counter-terrorism to energy to rebuilding Iraq and Afghanistan -- difficulties over the past two years have forced both Washington and Ankara to rebuild this critical strategic partnership based on new realities rather than false assumptions. It is time for both countries to move beyond finger pointing and mutual recriminations and remember why this relationship has benefited both countries for over five decades.